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ABSTRACT

Intended for teachers, this paper offers a method of incorporating narratives and postmodernism theory into the introductory communication course. It discusses narrative and the essential role it plays in attaching meaning to human experiences and establishing their identities. The paper describes the concepts taught in the introductory course, including perception, interpretation process, stereotyping, self-reflection, culture, and conflict. It then presents three activities to use in the basic communication course to integrate narrative perspectives toward communication. The paper includes a personal story of an instructor's teaching experience. (CR)

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Running Head: Incorporating Narratives and Postmodernism Theory into the Introductory Communication Speech Course

Incorporating Narratives and Postmodernism Theory into the Introductory Communication Speech Course

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The role in of narrative has gained increased attention in constructing human experience. Donald E. Polkinghorne, author of Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences, 1988, examines how narratives play an essential role in events which are significant to us. Postmodern theory consider narrative to be a central feature of how we construct reality. Polkinghorne informs us that narratives have beginnings, middles, and ends, and that organizing these events helps us to develop meaningful points or themes to the story. Telling a story allows us to reflect on a sequence of critical events that have occurred in our lives. Polkinghorne believes that "although narratives are ubiquitous, we are just beginning to appreciate their significance for creating and organizing our experience" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 184). He claims that stories help us get in touch with ourselves, and they help us form our identities. Polkinghorne argues that stories help us to organize human life and to give meaning to who we are and how we perceive our culture, people and ourselves. Organizing our experiences influences perception of ourselves. When we tell a story about ourselves or about an event we look back and reflect about what the event and the story means to us, and how it helps us to form our identity. He claims that "human beings are not simply constructions based on past events; they are also products of narrative structures. "They exist in narrative creations and are powerfully affected by them" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 121). That is we interpret and understand our experiences based on the stories that we tell. When we tell a story we form a self-identity, because the story structures our experience and allows us to reflect on our lives, and understand who we are and why we made certain decisions . When we speak about ourselves and when we hear others speak about us we develop and form an identity.

Polkinghorne claims that narrative explanation is retroactive, by retroactive he means telling stories helps us to clarify and understand significant events that have occurred, and it allows us to examine the outcome that has followed the event. He also argues that people can experience the same kind of life event, but have completely

different interpretations and perceptions of the event. Each person telling his or her story can change the meaning of the event, because everyone has different feelings and perceptions about how they feel about an event or situation.

When two or more people read the same story each reader brings different experiences, expectations, feelings and perceptions to the experience. Polkinghorne claims that interpretations differ because everyone has different personal and social experiences. He states that "Readers draw on their experiences with stories in the tradition and with their own narratively preconfigured understanding of their own lives as they approach a narrative."

Narratives allow us to understand and interpret our experiences. Polkinghorne states that "The experience with the narrative then adds to their own breadth of understanding of themselves" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 98).When people tell stories about their own life they are able to look back and interpret their own experience and this allows them to form identities about themselves. Polkinghorne states that "The study of a person's own experience of her or his life-span requires attending to the operations of the narrative form and to how this life story is related to the stories of others" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 119). In other words, sharing our stories with others helps us relate to other people who have had similar experiences in their lives.

Polkinghorne also informs us that stories also help us to form our culture. He claims that organizational myths, stories, sagas and legends help people interpret individual members of the organization and culture. Polkinghorne states that "we retrieve stories about our own and the community's past, and those provide models of how actions and consequences are linked" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 135). When we tell stories we are able to construct reality about our lives and the society in which we live.

The stories that we tell evolve and change over time. What something meant to someone in the past might not mean the same thing that it does now. The telling of stories

overtime can change one's identity, perceptions, and interpretations of experience because as we grow older and reflect back on critical events in our lives, our feelings toward the events may have changed. Changing our feelings about something that may have happened in the past also changes our story of what happened which in turn can change our identity, perception and interpretation of the situation. For example, when I was a teenager I thought my mother was too strict and unfair for giving me a curfew, making me do chores, making me pay for my own clothes, and making me get a job. Now when I look back I realize that my mother was making me a stronger and more responsible person by setting these rules, and I think it has helped me manage on my own effectively.

Stories also change throughout history. As we experience new events, dramas, technological advances, and disasters are view of the world can change. Our perception of what something once was has changed, and old stories are perceived differently and new stories are passed down. Telling myths, stories, sagas and legends help us to understand the society we live in and articulate cultural meanings for ourselves. Without narratives we would not be able to gain a sense of who we are or what kind of society in which we live. When we look back at past events we understand and interpret mistakes or accomplishments we have made, and events that we want to change. Telling stories allows us to see how our society was, but it also allows us to predict and change how we want our society to be in the future.

Polkinghorne also informs us how stories can help organizations. Many organizations have passed down stories to employees, and these stories help them to understand the organization's values and beliefs. It also helps people relate to other members in the organization. For example, the communication department of which I am a part of, always have returning graduate students tell the new graduate students stories about their experiences with teaching, classes, professors and graduate life. These stories help (sometimes in frightening ways) the new graduate students interpret and perceive

what graduate school is like. Studies in organizational culture have confirmed the importance of stories in organizations. Gareth Morgan, author of Images of Organization, 1997, state that " shared values, shared beliefs, shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense making are all different ways of describing culture" (Morgan, 1997, p. 138. These shared systems of meaning help to create values, norms, ceremonies and social practices between people in organizations.

Polkinghorne concludes that "the realm of meaning is structured according to linguistic forms, and one of the most important forms for creating meaning in human existence is the narrative" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 183). Polkinghorne's view reflects the Postmodernism view that reality is constructed through language and that stories are created from our experiences as we assign meaning to the past. Postmodernism claims that when we converse and tell stories we can attach meanings to our to our experiences, and we can change our stories as we interpret our experiences and develop new meanings (Guba, 1990). The Postmodernism views suggests, in the writing of Polkinghorne and others, that we gain an identity by telling stories about ourselves, and as our stories take on new interpretations our identity can be altered (Guba, 1990). Stories in our culture relate to the stories we tell about ourselves.

Since narratives play an essential role in attaching meanings to our experiences, and establishing our identities it is important to incorporate Postmodernism theory into the introductory speech 101 course. Therefore, a description of how postmodernism theory can be applied to the introductory course will be discussed by applications of the concepts taught. Central Michigan University's Speech and Dramatic Arts Department has chosen the textbook Communication in our Lives by Julia T. Wood, 1997 for the introductory speech course. Professors and graduate students came together and decided that this textbook complemented basic communication concepts. Our staff was also pleased with the diversity issues that Julia Wood brought into the textbook. The textbook consists of

fourteen chapters. These chapters include a discussion of communication, perception, personal identity, effective listening, verbal and nonverbal dimensions of communication, communication and cultures, interpersonal communication, personal relationships, group and team communication, task group communication, and public speaking. Concepts from Wood's textbook are compatible with narrative approaches to communication will be discussed in the following section.

One important concept that we teach in the introductory course which relates to narratives is *perception*. Wood defines perception as "an active process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting people, objects events, situations and activities" (Wood, 1997, p. 40). This concept relates to narratives because of the ways in which structure influence our perceptions and interpretations of people, objects, events, situations and activities. Perceptions are articulated through language as we tell a story about an event; figure emerges from background, and particulars' are selected from the totality of the experience. Telling a story about yourself, someone else or something allows us to interpret how we feel about the situation or person and it helps us to form our identity. As Polkinghorne suggests, stories and language allow us to organize human life and reality, and give meaning to people, objects, events, situations and activities.

Wood defines the *interpretation process* in perception as "the subjective process of explaining perceptions in ways that let us make sense of them" (Wood, 1997, p. 45). When we tell stories about ourselves we interpret experience and assign meaning to that experience; we tell stories about others' as a way to interpret, understand, or explain their behavior.

Another important concept which we teach in the introductory course is the concept of the *self*. Wood defines the self as " a complex process that involves internalizing and acting from social perspectives that we learn as we communicate" (Wood, 1997, p. 67). In Postmodernism theory and for Wood the self is not viewed as a

thing" or a stable entity, but a process that is in constant motion. Our sense of self is developed as we interact with others. The self develops as we communicate with people, and our family and peers have a significant impact on how we develop our identity. The stories that are passed down in our families reflect who we are, and the stories that our friends share with us also help us give us an identity. When we tell stories about what it was like to grow up in our families we are describing an event, and then perceiving and interpreting the event which in turn helps us to form an identity.

Stereotyping is a fundamental concept in the introductory course which relates to story telling and narratives. Wood defines stereotypes as "predictive generalizations about people about people and situations. She claims that stereotypes may be true and they may not be true. When we hear people in our culture or families tell stories about people of different races, ethnic backgrounds, and religions we interpret what they mean, and then we form our perceptions. The stories in the larger culture are connected to the stories we tell within our groups or families.

Self-reflection is also a concept which relates to narratives. Wood says that we need to be able to reflect back on our actions in order to have a self-identity. Telling stories about ourselves allows us to reflect back on our actions and feelings, therefore creating our self-identity. As you reflect back on a situation more and more, your story may change and you may feel differently about what occurred. Talking about your situation and describing events that took place help people to perceive and interpret how they feel, and it gives them the ability to reflect on themselves.

Another concept and chapter that relates to narrative is *culture*. Wood defines culture as " as system of ideas, values, beliefs, and customs that is communicated by one generation to the next and sustains sustains a particular way of life" (Wood, 1997, p. 179). Narratives relate to culture, because stories contribute to our system of ideas, values and beliefs and about the way life should be. Cultural narratives can reinforce the dominance

of groups in cultures, although many co-cultures do not believe in the messages that the dominant group conveys. Wood says that people in a culture work together to create a whole. This relates back to Polkinghorne and how he said that narratives function to create reality, meaning into wholes and the organization of human life.

Self-disclosure is another concept which is important to examine when analyzing narratives. When we tell stories about ourselves we are self-disclosing personal information about ourselves. Wood says that when we self-disclose personal information about ourselves "we express private hopes and fears, reveal personal feelings, and share experiences, perceptions, and events that are private" (Wood, 1997, p. 209). When we share stories about ourselves we are disclosing personal information about ourselves. It allows us to reflect and think about our identity, but it also allows people to form perceptions and interpretations about us too. We need to share stories in order for people to learn more about our background and what kind of environment we grew up in, without sharing stories it would be impossible to get to know people or their background. It would also be difficult for us to share feelings and become close to others. As we spend more time with someone, perhaps a new friend or significant other we begin to share more stories so we can get to know one another better and become closer.

The concept of *conflict* is important to narrative and the Postmodernism theory. Many times two people who have a conflict have very different stories of what happened. People in conflict usually tell their story of what happened to explain to others what occurred. Telling their story to others allows others to interpret and perceive the situation, and decide who is right or wrong, or how the conflict can be handled. Wood claims that we deepen our ideas and feelings when we express them to others. Telling stories allows us to express our feelings and it allows us to reflect on the situation and our identity.

In the public speaking chapter *interviews* relate to narratives. Many times when people are people interviewed they disclose their feelings and they share stories about things that have happened to them. Even groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, MADD, or SADD group members share stories about experiences they may have had. A member in Alcoholics Anonymous may share a story with others as to why she or he developed a drinking problem. A member of MADD might describe a story of someone who was injured in their family by a drunk driver. Telling these stories to a group of people who have experienced similar situations allow people to identify with others. When someone shares their stories with others through interviews they are giving information that could be extremely valuable. The movie "The Burning Bed" is an example of how a women told a story of her life as an abused wife (Williams, 1998). Telling her story while she was being interviewed by lawyers allowed the jury to relate, identify and understand why she felt her only option was to murder her husband. When they televised this movie it forced society to realize that women cannot always walk out of an abusive situation, and that sometimes they are literally forced to stay in an abusive relationship. Many women who were also victims of wife abuse, related to the story of Francine Hughes, and they too felt like it was impossible to just leave their husbands. It also reinforced society to have shelters available for women, and during commercials many hot line numbers were flashed on the screen for women who needed support.

Examples also relate well to narratives. When we self-disclose information and tell a story about ourselves we often to this to offer an example of something that has happened to us. Wood says that examples "are single instances used to make a point, dramatize an idea, or personalize information. Telling a story to show an example of something gives your audience personalized information. Julia states that telling stories in a speech put a human face into certain issues and it helps listeners to understand the personal meaning being addressed.

Polkinghorne says that "narratives organize events into wholes that have beginnings, middles, and ends" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 183). Beginnings, middles and ends relate to directly to how we teach speech students to write a speech. We teach them that they need to start off with an attention-getter, and have a body, and an effective closure. Even a speech can be similar to a story when you put it in this format. When we give an audience information on a topic we are organizing information based on past events.

Narrative communication plays an essential role in our lives. Without narratives it would be impossible to construct meanings, reality and personal identities. From a Postmodernism perspective narrative and communication is important for speech students in the basic course to understand the relationship of processes to communication. The following can be used in the basic communication course to integrate narrative perspectives toward communication.

The first activity I will describe relates to having the students identify themselves through a story. Teachers should have students identify some type of role they have in their life. It could be an aunt, a sister or brother, a wife or husband, a daughter or son, a basketball star, a student etc. Each student must identify one role that he or she plays in their lives. They must reflect back and write a short story on one situation that happened to them while they were in the role. It should be something that influenced or inspired them in someway. Then they should describe how they felt about the situation, why it influenced or inspired them, and what they learned from the situation. They should then describe how they think their story helps to identify who they are.

After students complete the assignment the teacher should ask volunteers to share their stories. The teacher should then ask them how they felt about the situation, why their story was influential to them, and what they learned from the writing of the story. In addition, the teacher could ask the students how their stories help to identify who they are,

and whether they felt differently about the situation in the past. The teacher could also ask the class further questions such as 1) Why do you think sharing stories is important? 2) How can sharing stories help us to become closer and understand one another? 3) How do stories influence or develop a culture? 4) How do you think a speech relates to a story? 5) How do you think stories can influence a society? 6) Why do our interpretations of our stories sometimes change over time? 7) How do stories allow us to reflect back and learn about events that have occurred in the past, and how do stories help us understand the present, and think about the future?

The second activity relates to how our stories can be perceived differently over time. Students should think of a story that they feel differently about now then they did at an earlier time in their lives. Again they should write a short story identify a situation that happened to them in the past, and they should describe how they interpreted and perceived the event in the past. They should then describe how they feel about the situation now, and why they think their feelings have changed over time. Again, the teacher should ask for volunteers to share their stories, and their feelings as to why they have changed their perception of the story. Some processing questions could include; 1) Why do you think you feel differently now then you did then? 2) What did you learn from this experience? 3) How do new experiences make you feel differently about your stories?
4) How do you think looking back and identifying your feelings then and now help you to understand your self? 5) What specific occurrences helped you to change your perception of your story?

The third activity I will discuss also has to do with perceptions. The teacher can pick a story of their choice, or show a video clip of a movie that is making a significant point about a relationship or an issue. I am going to choose a story from the book "Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul", 1996, by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Jennifer Read Hawthorne, and Marci Shimoff. I will select a story form the "Overcoming

Obstacles" chapter, because I think no matter whether you are male or female life is always filled with overcoming obstacles. After reading the story or showing the video clip, the teacher can ask students questions which pertain to the story. Some questions can include: 1)What happened in the story? 2) Do you think it reflects an important issue about the present and the past? Why? 3) Have you learned something significant about this person's story? What did you learn? 4) How do you feel about this person's situation? Do you agree with his or her position? Why or why not? 5) How do you think people in this situation could identify with this woman? 6) Why do you think the books "Chicken Soup" and Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul help people to understand themselves? 7) How can stories in general help us to understand our self-identity, cultures, and other people?

These three activities can help students understand the importance of narratives. These activities can also help students identify themselves, understand the culture they live in, and assist them in forming perceptions and interpretations. In the following paragraphs I will present a personal story of my teaching experience as a way of demonstrating the relationships between narrative and communication in a form similar to that described in the first activity.

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I think the first time I started to think about graduate school and the teaching assistantship was my senior year of college. Before my senior year I thought that I was definitely ready to leave Central Michigan University and begin my career, but as it got closer to graduation I felt that going to graduate school would be a good opportunity. I began to weigh out the pros and cons of going to graduate or leaving school and starting my career. It was a difficult decision for me, but through my experience with being an undergraduate teaching assistant, and taking a graduate level course helped me to make my decision about graduate school.

When I became an undergraduate teaching assistant I really got to know other graduate students, and many of them encouraged me to go to graduate school and become a teaching assistant. I remember one graduate friend of mine who encouraged me to become a graduate assistant. It was a cold night and we were walking out of a graduate class that we were taking together and we had a short conversation about graduate school.

Kim: I think you should really go to graduate school Colleen, and become a graduate assistant. It's a lot of work, but it is a great experience, and teaching is a lot of fun. I think you are a great UTA and I think you would make a wonderful graduate teaching assistant. Plus the classes aren't that bad, and as long as you keep up with all of the work you will do fine. Also, it is really important to get a masters degree with all of the competition out there.

Colleen: Well it is definitely something to think about. I think it would be a great opportunity to be a graduate student, and be able to teach the introductory communication course. It is something I will definitely consider. Thanks for the information.

I was also encouraged to apply for the assistantship from a couple of my professors, and this really helped me to make my decision. I remember one professor, saying to me "Have you ever thought about graduate school ?," and I replied, "yes, but not now, maybe in the future after I'm in a career for a while". Well after experiencing a graduate level course and being a UTA my feelings had changed, and I thought having the opportunity to become a teaching assistant and have my tuition covered for was worth the investment.

I really began to see how much I liked teaching when I was a UTA. I really enjoyed interacting with the students in my group. I liked helping students grasp concepts, and learn the material. I remember when one student came up to me and said

"Colleen, thank-you so much for all of your help, I ended up getting an A on my outline, and I couldn't have done it without your help". I remember feeling so important after she confronted me with her excitement. I feel that being a UTA gave me a leadership role, and it also gave me more confidence in myself. I liked having the responsibility of planning learning activities and grading their papers. I thought it was so exciting when we got to teach a chapter. I remember being so nervous, and I kept thinking to myself, what if something goes wrong, or what if the students don't behave. Everything ended up working out well, and I knew that after teaching a chapter that teaching the class would be something I would enjoy. I remember when the graduate assistant of the class, said "Colleen I think you did a great job, and the students seem to like you."

I also enjoyed listening to my students' comments and concerns about the class. I also felt inspired by some of their comments, such as being "understanding", "caring", "friendly", "helpful", "approachable", and "positive." One student in my group even told me that he thought, " I was the best UTA, and that he enjoyed the class because of our group."

When I took a graduate level course as an undergraduate I felt as though I began to learn a lot about graduate school life. The course gave me a taste of what graduate school classes were like, and listening to other graduate students experiences with graduate school gave me an idea of what it would be like.

I remember the professor walking up to me during a break, and commenting how well she thought I was doing in the course. I felt proud when she told me, and I started to gain more confidence. I liked how we engaged in serious and important topics about communication, and I felt challenged in the graduate course that I took. I ended up doing well in the course, and I knew I would be able to make it through graduate school.

I first started graduate school in the summer of 1997. We were required to attend a three week training session for teaching. I was scared to death, but I was also excited. I

remember one professor in particular who frightened our entire group by telling us that only 33% of us would make it through the graduate program. He then proceeded to tell us how difficult the graduate courses were, and how many people end up dropping out. Nine other graduate students and I were sweating with fear after he left the room. However, the training program really helped me learn more about how to be an effective teacher, and how to handle certain situations.

I felt more comfortable after I got to know the director and her two assistants, they were very encouraging, and they made the intensive three week training program a lot of fun. The training program gave me confidence to go into the classroom Monday morning and teach the class. I felt prepared to enter the classroom and teach speech class.

However, when the first day of teaching arrived I felt very nervous before entering the classroom, but I kept telling myself I have to do this and I can do this. When I entered the classroom I was nervous and it was probably apparent to the students that I was a new teacher, but something told me that I had to get through this and I managed to have a successful first day.

I looked around at a class full of thirty students, just staring at me. I think they actually weren't quite sure if I was the teacher or not, since many of them were close to my age. I remember my heart was pounding, my palms were sweaty, and my throat was dry, but something came over me, and I was able to get through the first day.

I was teaching two classes by myself, and although I found it to be challenging at times I really loved teaching. I loved helping students understand the concepts and I liked opening their minds to the world of communication. I also felt that I could easily relate to them, because I had just graduated from college myself. Students told me that I gave them examples they could understand and relate to, and they appreciated my enthusiasm and energy. I appreciated hearing this from certain students, and it made me even more motivated to teach.

The student in particular who came to my office for help with assignments quite frequently, told me that my class was her favorite class, because she liked how we talked about concepts and did activities, and she also liked meeting other students. Two of my students even started dating each other after class was over.

Although, I truly enjoyed teaching there were times that were frustrating. I didn't like the fact that some students felt like they had to be in speech class only because it was a requirement. I also didn't like the fact that students would not read the chapters and they wanted me to spoon feed them.

I had one student who used to come to my office, and try to tell me how to run my class. He would say, "well I think you should lecture more, and give us outlines of all of the chapters, because we all have other important classes, and we don't have enough time for this class." I replied, "Well I'm sorry you feel that way, I can try to incorporate a little more lecture into my lesson plan, but the activities and conversations will not stop".

I also didn't like it when students did not take the class seriously. At times like this, I sometimes felt like I was not accomplishing all of my goals as a teacher, and sometimes I felt disappointed in myself, because I wanted everyone to enjoy my class. I often asked peers for advice on how to handle problem students and how to get students to read, and how to get students more actively involved with the material and public speeches. Sometimes I would get discouraged, but I always wanted to improve my teaching style. Sometimes other graduate students would tell me how great their class was, and how much their students loved them, but I knew I couldn't say that, because I recognized that teaching isn't always a piece of cake.

I remember the first time my teaching mentor came in to observe my teaching. I remember being nervous, but I was also anxious to get feedback from my mentor. I wanted to discover what an experienced faculty member thought about my teaching. It

was interesting to find out what my perceptions were versus what my teaching mentors perceptions of my teaching style were.

I remember the first day she came in to observe me. I thought she was a wonderful professor, so I was very nervous to have her observe me, even though we really got along well. I was wearing my best outfit, and I looked very professional. I had the chairs set up in a horse shoe style, and I remember looking out into the classroom and seeing her smiling at me, ready for me to begin class. I felt nervous once again and I had the usual nerve wracking symptoms, dry mouth, sweaty palms, fast heart rate, but her smile really helped me feel better fast. It amazes me how much a sincere smile can make someone feel more relaxed. I didn't feel like I had to put on an act, and be somebody I'm wasn't, just because my teaching mentor was in the room. I began to feel comfortable, and I just proceeded with my teaching style.

The next day my teaching mentor took me out to lunch at the University Cup (a nice cozy coffee and deli shop near campus). My teaching mentor told me that she thought I was very comfortable standing up in front of the students, and that I had good presentation and lecture skills. She told me that I had a positive rapport with students.

She also said that I was well-organized and I did a good job with leading discussions and asking questions. Some of the area she said I could improve in is effectiveness in processing activities, and time management skills. I remember I felt so bad about these areas, because the activity that I had planned took so long that I ran out of time to process the activity.

My mentor had recommended that I should have broken that lesson plan and activity into two days in order to leave time for processing. She also said that I needed to talk more about how to adapt messages to audiences since that was the material I was covering. I was fairly pleased with my feedback from my mentor, and although I knew there was room for improvement I also knew that she thought I was a hard working

graduate assistant. One conversation I remember having was about a problem student in one of my classes. I asked for advice:

Colleen: I have this student in class, who always tells us how much he loves to get wasted on the weekends, and how he loves to party. He also tends to make other inappropriate remarks. Also, when we have class discussions he puts other people's ideas and opinions down.

Shelly: Yes, I have had students like that in the past, and it can be frustrating. I think you need to confront him about his behavior after class. Tell him that you appreciate his participation in class, but he needs to be careful of the comments that he makes, because they are inappropriate and he might hurt others' feelings.

Colleen: Thanks, for the advice. I will pull him aside tomorrow, and tell him how I feel about his disruptive behavior in class.

Anyway, I pulled Bobbie aside the next day after class to confront him about his behavior.

Colleen: Bobbie, I think your a very nice person, and I appreciate your participation in class, however I think your comments about drinking and partying are a bit inappropriate. Also, I think you should be careful about putting down other peoples' comments in class, because it could hurt their feelings.

Bobbie: I know Ms. Williams you are right. Sometimes I do act up in class, but I don't mean to do it. I just don't think sometimes. I always got in trouble with teachers in high school too for acting up or saying things that I shouldn't. I will try to be more careful in the future.

After he walked away, I felt like I had really accomplished my goal. I told him how I felt without getting angry or making him feel really bad. I was also happy that he understood

how I felt, and that he acknowledged his behavior. From that point on, his behavior did become much better in class.

My second semester teaching went a bit better, because of course I had been through it before and I had more experience with teaching. This was the first time I had ever had such an active class. At the time I thought that they were too active, but after my teaching mentor came into my class to observe me my feelings changed. When my teaching mentor came in to observe me we talked about my class:

Joan: Many students seemed involved in the class discussion and that they were working hard to answer questions and participate in class. A loud class doesn't always necessarily mean a bad class. As a matter of fact, it seems as though they are competing for your attention.

Colleen: Yeah I guess that makes sense to me, and I'm glad you feel this way. Pointing this out to me really makes me feel better about my teaching.

As I entered my third semester I felt that I had much more knowledge about teaching and about who I am as a teacher. From experiencing two semesters of teaching I began to recognize my own teaching style. I didn't feel the need to teach like other people, but to be myself, and to have confidence in the way I teach. I do analyze my teaching, and I strive to make improvements, however I feel that I am trying my best, and I feel that I am not only knowledgeable of the material, but I give good examples and explanations of the material.

I have also learned that I can relate to students without trying to hard to get them to like me. They will have respect for me as long as I am teaching the material in a way that is helping them comprehend the concepts. I also feel that I have learned to be more assertive in the classroom. I no longer allow side conversations exist, and I address them in a timely and effective manner. I also feel like I am better able to handle students who

make smart remarks. This semester I had a problem student in the beginning of the semester, but she is no longer a problem student. I found that embarrassing her in nonchalant way has put an end to her comments and rudeness in class. The second time I taught this class Jill decided to tell me:

Jill: Chapter 1 is so boring, it is the same information over and over, it is so redundant. I don't know why the author keeps saying the same thing over and over, this is ridiculous.

Colleen: Well I guess since you think it is so redundant your just going to ace the first test aren't you?

Other students in the room started to laugh, although I kept a straight face. Needless to say, she did not say another word for the entire class period.. In fact, to this day she has had a better attitude towards me and the class.

Another episode occurred when two of my students were having a side conversation. I was giving a lecture on effective listening, and they were deciding not to listen. So I made sure that they knew I noticed:

Colleen: Everyone, it looks like Jim and Jerry are doing a good job demonstrating selective listening for us. (Everyone then looks over at them and starts to laugh.)

Jim and Jerry: Oh, um, oh yeah, ok. Sorry.

Colleen: Well can one of you please define selective listening and give me an example of what is it is?

Jim: Oh yeah, um sure. Well.... it means choosing what you want to listen to, kind of what Jerry and I were doing.

Colleen: Yes, very good Jim. Now you to are going to have to pay attention, I wouldn't want to have to separate you two.

I have learned a lot about my teaching style through experience, but reflecting back on my previous semesters of teaching has helped me to identify who I am as a teacher, and to recognize my strengths and weaknesses. Telling this story has helped me understand where I was yesterday where I am today, and perhaps where I will be tomorrow.

Narratives need to be recognized and appreciated for the contribution they make for creating and organizing who we are and what our values, beliefs and ideas consist of independently and as a culture. Narratives help us to apply meaning to events that occur in our lives, and they give us an identity as to who we are. The importance of the role of narrative needs to be recognized by everyone. Integrating narratives into the basic course is crucial in order for students to understand the role of narratives in our lives.

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